

## **United States Army Military Readiness September 2006**

The U.S. Army's preparedness for war has eroded to levels not witnessed by our country in decades. As deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan continue unabated, there is a very real prospect that Army readiness will continue to erode, undermining its ability to meet the theater commanders' needs and foreclosing any option for the U.S. to respond to conflicts elsewhere around the globe. The degradation of Army readiness is primarily a function of unanticipated high troop deployment levels to Iraq, chronic equipment and personnel shortages, funding constraints, and Pentagon civilian mismanagement. These factors have resulted in:

- The likelihood that many Army combat and support units scheduled to deploy to Iraq in 2007 will have less than the required one year period for rest and re-training. This is one of the key indicators that lead many Army officials to conclude that current deployment rates cannot be sustained without breaking the force.
- The lowest readiness levels for the vast majority of non-deployed active-duty combat units. The situation for the Army Guard and Reserves is worse.
- Thousands of key Army weapons platforms – such as tanks, Humvees, Bradley Fighting Vehicles – sitting in disuse at Army maintenance depots for lack of funding.
- Indications of growing drug and discipline problems among the newest Army recruits.
- Many Army units here at home have been forced to spend much of their time and energy on managing equipment and personnel shortfalls, instead of training or spending time with their families.
- Commanders at all levels reporting that Army families are becoming increasingly anxious, even angry, about current and future deployments.

In effect, the Army has become a “hand-to-mouth” organization. Its inability to get ahead of the deployment and training curves is rooted in the Administration’s miscalculations and blind optimism about troop and industrial surge requirements for the U.S. occupation of Iraq. The consequent failure to plan has forced the Army to play catch-up ever since the fall of Baghdad. Though senior Army leaders contend that equipment and personnel shortages thus far have not prevented the service from meeting the theater commanders’ needs, they allude to a widespread concern that the Army will emerge from the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts as a weakened and worn-out force. Addressing the Army’s short- and long-term needs will require:

- Robust funding increases for rehabilitating and replacing equipment.
- A national commitment to improve Army readiness and focus attention on military service.
- A reduction in U.S. deployments to Iraq.

### **Current Deployment Requirements**

In June of 2003, the Pentagon’s planners assumed that the U.S. would withdraw all of its combat brigades from Iraq roughly 20 months after the end of major combat operations. Those plans were revised in September of that year, and assumed a complete withdrawal about one year later than had previously been expected. Today, there are 16 U.S. combat brigades in Iraq (including 2 Marine Corps regiments), and there is little prospect that the deployment rate will decrease in the near future. In fact, reports indicate that theatre commanders will request a higher number of combat brigades than currently deployed. The expectation that high deployment rates will continue is bolstered by a palpable skepticism among some in the Army about the Iraqi security forces and ministries. For example, Army commanders who recently returned from Iraq indicated that corruption and incompetence are rampant within the Iraqi Defense and Interior Ministries.

#### **Key Facts:**

- The Army currently has 39 active-duty combat brigades, as it builds to a total of 42 under the restructuring plan known as “modularity.” Over the coming months, roughly 19.5 combat brigades will be committed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Army doctrine calls for 2 units to be held in reserve (for rest and

training) for every unit deployed. As of today, the Army has only one unit in reserve for every unit deployed – a ratio that history shows cannot be sustained for any length of time without serious adverse consequences to the force.

- Moreover, the Army's Force Generation Model calls for a three-year cycle in which Army active-duty units would deploy for one-year, return and reset over another year, and train and prepare for deployment over the third year. Given current deployment rates and the insufficient number of Army combat brigades, the Army model is conceptually sound but in practice remains little more than a figment of the Army's imagination.
- In fact it's quite likely that Army combat units preparing for the next rotation (07-09) will be "short-cycled"; that is, units will be forced to return to battle with less than one year's time to recuperate, reset, and train. For example, the 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division returned from Iraq in February of this year. Prior to the last deployment it had a 16-month preparation period. The brigade now expects to receive its "prepare to deploy" orders within roughly the next 3 months, which would force the brigade to curtail training and eliminate leave for its soldiers.
- The situation for the Army's combat support and combat service support units (CS/CSS), such as military police and civil affairs, is worse. Manned mostly by the Guard and Reserve, the Army has been forced to cobble together CS/CSS units in order to meet theater deployment requirements. Since January of 2005, roughly three-quarters of all CS/CSS units deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan were augmented with Army personnel pulled from other units, personnel trained for other jobs, personnel from other military services or, increasingly, private contractors.
- For rotation 07-09, even though roughly 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the CS/CSS units scheduled to deploy will be composed of personnel from other services, the Army is still short of the units needed to meet the theater commanders' requirements.
- The Army's ability to meet CS/CSS unit requirements is constrained by the lack of Guard and Reserve soldiers available to meet future missions. Of the 341,000 Army National Guard soldiers in uniform, only roughly 50,000 remain available for mobilization. For the Army Reserve, only about 56,000 of the 190,000 in uniform are available. Thus, Army leaders

expressed strong concern about the need to re-examine the Administration's current policy of not extending the reserve mobilization period beyond two years.

## **Current Army Readiness**

Army military readiness rates have declined to levels not seen since the end of the Vietnam War. Roughly one-half of all Army units (deployed and non-deployed, active and reserves) received the lowest readiness rating any fully formed unit can receive. Prior to 9/11, only about 20 percent of the Army received this lowest rating – a fact driven almost exclusively by shortfalls in the reserves. Army units in either Iraq or Afghanistan generally are at peak readiness levels, as they should be. At issue are the *non-deployed units* – those based in the United States and Europe. It is these units that are critically short of equipment and personnel, causing the vast majority of them to be rated at the lowest readiness levels.

Equipment and personnel shortfalls in non-deployed units limit their ability to fully train for combat. Army units spend the time between combat deployments undertaking a series of progressively larger and more complex training exercises. It is the larger, more complex training exercises that are adversely affected by shortfalls. As a result, Army leaders have witnessed a marked decline in Army heavy combat brigade performance at its National Training Center exercises – the key test for any Army unit prior to deployment. Ultimately, under-trained units are likely to experience higher casualty and accident rates in theater.

Moreover, the Army's non-deployed units make up its strategic reserve. These are the units that would be called on to go to war in North Korea, Iran, or elsewhere. The degradation of Army readiness here at home has effectively eliminated the United States ground force strategic reserve.

### Key Facts:

- Of the 16 active-duty, non-deployed combat brigades in the United States managed by the Army's Forces Command, the vast majority of them are rated at the lowest readiness ratings. These ratings are caused by severe equipment shortages.
- Of particular concern is the readiness rates of the units scheduled to deploy later this year, particularly the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division. This division and its 4 brigades will deploy to Iraq in

October at the lowest level of readiness because of equipment shortfalls. To meet its needs, this unit – like virtually all other units that have recently deployed or will soon deploy to Iraq – must fall-in on equipment in theater. Operating unfamiliar, battle weary equipment increases the potential for casualties and accidents.

- Again, the situation facing the Army Guard and Reserve is comparatively worse. Of all the Guard units not currently mobilized, about four-fifths received the lowest readiness rating. Conversely, only about 1 in 10 received the highest or second highest ratings for readiness, which are the ratings traditionally required for a unit to be considered capable of deploying and completing its mission. The same is true for the Army Reserve; about four-fifths of non-mobilized Army Reserve units received the two lowest readiness ratings; only one in 10 received the two top ratings. Personnel shortages are the major reason behind the decline in Guard and Reserve readiness – shortages created, for the most part, by mobilizations having lapsed or personnel having been pulled from units to augment others in theater.
- The Army's difficulties here at home have been compounded by funding shortfalls in and mismanagement of its base operations and building maintenance budget. Army bases around the country were unable to pay utility and commercial services bills for many months during the current fiscal year. Custodial and dining hall operations also were curtailed. The \$800 million shortfall in base operations and building maintenance funding was recently corrected through a major transfer of funds from key readiness accounts, such as training and equipment maintenance programs. Nonetheless, officials at various installations around the country believe that the Army's woes will continue until the newly-created Army Installation Management Activity (IMA) can resolve significant management shortcomings.

### **Equipment Reset, Recapitalization, and Replacement**

The Army uses the term “reset” to characterize two levels of equipment maintenance activities. The first level encompasses low-level maintenance activities that occur in the field, principally at bases overseas and in the United States. The second set of activities is those conducted at

large, industrial Army maintenance depots here at home or at private contractor facilities, and includes complex overhauls or major subsystem replacements. Army reset maintenance is designed to rehabilitate equipment to a “fully mission capable” status (known as “10/20 standards” in Army parlance) – the operational standard required for home-station training and/or return to battle. Funding for equipment reset is provided, for the most part, through the Army’s operation and maintenance accounts.

Equipment recapitalization goes further on the maintenance continuum. Recapitalization work – done exclusively at Army depots or contractor facilities – enhances the weapon system by adding new technological features as the equipment is being completely overhauled. Recapitalization extends the life of the equipment, achieving what the Army terms as a “zero mile/zero hours” status. Funding for Army recapitalization is provided mostly in procurement accounts.

Of all the short-term issues confronting the Army, the need to reset and recapitalize battle-worn equipment is what concerns its leaders most. As of today, some 20 to 30 percent of all Army equipment is not in service, either in transit or undergoing maintenance. Senior Army officials understand that the reset and recapitalization programs are the linchpin to improving Army readiness now (“turning red to green”) and sustaining the Army for the near future. This is the reason why General Schoomaker, the Army Chief of Staff, recently and forcefully testified about the need for additional funding in FY 2007 for these programs. All told Gen. Schoomaker testified that the Army needs an additional \$17.1 billion for reset (\$6.5 billion), recapitalization (\$8.5 billion), and replacing battle losses (\$2.1 billion).

One of the bright spots on the Army’s otherwise darkened horizon has been its repair parts and supply operations. Though initially challenged at the start of the Iraq war, supply operations have improved to the point that virtually all Army units are reporting peak readiness for repair parts and supply levels. This has a direct, positive effect on field level maintenance.

Unfortunately, the Army’s maintenance depots here at home have not been able to keep pace with demands created by the war. This has occurred for two principal reasons: 1) inadequate planning precluded the Army from establishing early on procedures for cycling equipment from the theater, to the depots, to home bases, and then back to battle; 2) though the Army has established better procedures for managing equipment flow, funding levels

have not been adequate to meet the growing depot maintenance workload. This has resulted in significant repair backlogs at the Army depots for many of the service's most important weapons systems. Army leaders were quick to point out that, had it not been for Congressional initiatives to increase funding for equipment maintenance (and address new equipment shortages), the Army would be in worse shape than it is currently.

Key Facts:

- Funding shortfalls have created backlogs at all of the Army's key depot maintenance facilities. At Anniston Army Depot in Alabama, some 600 M1 tanks sit in disuse. At Red River Army Depot in Texas, 700 Bradley Fighting Vehicles and over 450 trucks have not been serviced. Roughly 2,600 Humvees are sitting idle at various Army depots. Tens of thousands of small arms, communications sets, and other key items have been similarly backlogged.
- This issue is not one of capacity. All of the backlogs referenced above can be cleared well within the maximum workload capacity levels at each of the depots.
- The situation at Anniston is instructive. The depot is currently running two shifts, with the second shift operating at only 30 percent of capacity. In FY 2006, the depot had plans and requirements to execute 7.2 million man-hours of work. But funding cuts by Congress (the 1 percent across-the-board reduction), the Army, and OSD limited workload levels to only 6.3 million man-hours. The depot could have executed the additional 0.9 million man-hours without having to hire more workers. If funding had been provided for the additional man-hours (\$180 million), the depot could have reduced the M1 tank backlog by 180.
- Erasing all the equipment backlogs will take roughly 1.5 to 2 years, with reasonable increases in both funding for and employment levels at the depots. Operating at maximum capacity, the depots could eliminate the backlogs sooner, but there are good economic arguments against doing this.

## **Personnel Recruitment and Training**

The Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) is responsible for recruiting new troops, providing initial-entry training for new recruits as well as classroom training and education for more advanced enlistees and officers, and setting recruiting and training policies and standards. In a nutshell: Business is booming. This year TRADOC will train more troops than in any other year since the Vietnam War. Training loads have increased significantly because of the need to recruit more troops to fill Army ranks; train other military servicemembers who are augmenting Army units in theater; re-training Army soldiers with different occupational skills in demand overseas (such as military police); and educating all troops in new tactics, techniques, and procedures that have been incorporated in the training syllabi as a result of lessons learned in the wars (e.g., detainee operations).

The Army has done well to implement lessons learned from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars into its training doctrine and standards. Informed by a well-established feedback loop with the theaters of operation, the Army expanded the number of training tasks and battle drills each soldier must complete before being assigned (or re-assigned) to a unit. In addition to the traditional soldiering skills taught to every soldier, new tasks and battle drills were added to:

- Improve the marksmanship and weapons handling skills of all soldiers, in recognition that all combat and support units will likely face enemy fire in a counterinsurgency/urban conflict.
- Improve movement, fighting, and communications techniques in urban operations.
- Provide basic instruction on detainee handling.
- Provide basic instruction on how to manage force escalation when dealing with insurgents and civilians.
- Improve first aid skills for dealing with severe wounds caused by IEDs.

Yet, like the other Army major commands (though to a lesser degree), TRADOC faces equipment and funding shortfalls. The command reported that, without an increase of \$400 million over the President's FY 2007 budget request, it will be forced to cancel some training classes. In addition,



the command made the case that an additional \$120 million is needed for recruiting and retention programs in FY 2007.

Though the \$120 million shortfall undoubtedly will be covered in the FY 2007 emergency supplemental bridge fund, it is the Army's ability to continue recruiting and retaining qualified personnel that generates the greatest concern amongst its leaders. Trends in parental support for military service and the propensity to serve among qualified high school graduates have declined over the past several years, shrinking the available pool of candidates from which to draw recruits. Senior Army leaders worry that Washington has failed to generate a national commitment to the wars, forcing them to rely on increasingly risky measures to make their recruiting and retention goals, such as increasing bonus incentives, relaxing age limitations and tattoo policies, expanding the number of Category 4 recruits (those who score lowest on entrance exams), and expanding the number of recruits entering the service who have criminal records. While most senior officials argue that the Army will make its recruiting and retention goals this year with little or no degradation in the overall quality of the force, they realize that some time must pass before the combined outcome from these risky recruiting policy changes is known. Yet, when questioned about recent recruiting classes, many of the Army's young field officers (captains and majors) indicated that the quality had "gone south" – an ominous trend for the future well-being of the force.

#### Key Facts:

- For FY 2006 the Army's goal is to recruit 80,000 new active-duty enlisted soldiers. By the end of August, the service was on track to meet that goal, though data for September suggest that the Army may fall short by about 1,000 recruits. Last year the Army missed its goal by 6,700 recruits.
- The Army's delayed entry pool (DEP) of active duty recruits has shrunk to 10 percent of the recruiting goal, the lowest level in years. As a reference, the DEP held 43 percent of the recruiting goal in 2004.
- Active-duty re-enlistment data show that the Army will meet its annual goals for first-term and career re-enlistees. Similar to last year, current data indicates that the Army is struggling to meet its re-enlistment goals for mid-termers (junior NCOs and field grade officers). It is in this last category of re-enlistments

that Army officials anticipate the ill-effects from multiple deployments overseas to be registered.

- The Army reserves also are currently on track to meet their recruiting missions this year, a significant improvement over last year when the Guard and Reserve made only 85 percent and 80 percent, respectively, of the 2005 goals. Like the active-duty force, the reserves' recruiting programs have been bolstered by the addition of new recruiters, increases in enlistment bonuses and referral incentives, and the relaxation of age and tattoo policies. Yet, as with the active-duty force, the reserve DEP has dropped significantly (12 percent of the recruiting goal).
- All agree that the most effective enhancement to the Army recruiting program has been the addition of recruiters. Since 2004, the number of Army recruiters has increased by 30 percent.
- Nonetheless, pressure to meet recruiting goals has forced the service to increase the number of Category 4 recruits from 2 percent to 4 percent of the annual goal, and increase the percent of recruits who receive medical, moral, or criminal record waivers from 10 percent of the 2001 recruiting class, to 15 percent in 2005, and possibly as much as 18 percent in 2006.
- To judge the quality and commitment of these latest recruiting classes, Army officials are paying close attention to attrition rates – that is, the percent of troops who either leave voluntarily or who are forced out for disciplinary, medical, or other reasons. The latest trends present a mixed picture. For example, in 2004 the attrition rate of soldiers who had been in the service for 0 to 6 months was 16.5 percent. Today, that figure has dropped to 10 percent. A positive reading of this trend would suggest that troops who join today know that they are going to war, and are willing to work hard to have an opportunity to serve and remain in the Army. A negative reading suggests that the Army has relaxed its standards in order to retain as many new recruits as possible to fill the war ranks. Anecdotal evidence from discussions with Army company commanders suggests the latter. For example, these commanders reported that the number of disciplinary actions resulting from drug and alcohol abuse had skyrocketed over the past year.

## **Financial Matters**

Army officials across-the-board recognize that, had it not been for Congressional action to initiate bridge fund supplementals beginning in FY 2005 and increase funding to address equipment shortages and maintenance, the service would be much worse off than it is today. Nonetheless, as evidenced by the fiscal vagaries that beset the Army in FY 2006, concern is widespread among Army financial managers that FY 2007 and beyond will be little better. Below are their chief concerns:

- *Cash Flow:* Uncertainty over the timing of receiving base bill and supplemental funding causes significant cash flow management issues for the Army. In FY 2006 for example, the late receipt of base bill funding and the delay in approving the supplemental earlier this year forced the Army to curtail training events and freeze civilian personnel hiring, among other actions. Ultimately, the service was forced to transfer billions of dollars from important procurement and operations accounts to cover shortfalls in base operations, building maintenance, and military personnel pay.
- *Base Bill v. Supplemental Funding:* Congress has reallocated funding for programs normally covered in the base bill to the emergency supplementals. Army officials recognize this to be a short-term gain for potentially long-term pain. Officials throughout the Army's major commands strongly urged that Congress preserve robust base bill topline levels and constrain funding in supplementals to only those programs that are truly war related.
- *Funding Shortfalls:* Army officials have testified and reported that the Administration's FY 2007 defense budget request and the Future Years Defense Plan under consideration by the Pentagon significantly underfunds Army reset, recapitalization, and modernization programs. As a result, Army leaders at the major commands anticipate that FY 2007 will witness similar cash flow and budget management problems that the service experienced in FY 2006.

## **Sustaining the Army Now and for the Future**

As we have come to expect, the U.S. Army is imbued with a "whatever-it-takes" spirit of commitment and hard work; it has been given a mission and it will complete that mission. Yet, it is becoming increasingly apparent that that level of commitment has not been met by the civilian officials charged with overseeing and assuring the well-being of our

military. The mere fact that roughly one-half of the entire U.S. Army is reported to be at the lowest level of military readiness speaks volumes in this regard. Perhaps most troubling to many of the Army's senior uniformed leaders is the lack of national attention to the Army's plight. To suggest that the Global War on Terror will last for years, yet fail to even acknowledge – let alone take steps to address – the Army's readiness, equipment, and personnel shortfalls, is viewed as short-sighted at best. At worst, the future security and deterrent power of the United States is dangerously at risk.